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A Half-Back's Interference

A Farce in One Act

By

M. N. BEEBÉ

*Author of "The Poets' Club," "The
All-America Eleven," etc.*

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1912

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A Half-Back's Interference

CHARACTERS

HIRAM PEPPERS, *owner of Highland Farm.*
BUD PEPPERS, *his son.*
J. WILSON PUFFER, *a New York "Promoter."*
JACK DREW, *a "Varsity" half-back.*
SAM, *his colored rubber.*
MIKE RILEY,
OLE SWANSON, } *farm hands.*
PETE, *a chore boy.*
AMOS SEARCHER, *a detective.*
SQUIRE EZRA STEBBINS, *"Agin Football."*



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A Half-Back's Interference

SCENE.—*Unimportant, but if used should be arranged to represent interior of HIRAM PEPPERS' barn; two empty barrels and floor space for ten characters covers all necessary requirements. No football formations are used, so a small stage can be utilized. Exits L. and R.*

Enter BUD PEPPERS. Seats himself on upturned pail, takes book from pocket and begins reading. **Enter PEP.**

PEP. Wal, I'll be derned. Can't yer find nothin' to do around these here five hundred and eighty acres but waste yer time over one of those there yaller backs?

BUD. This isn't a yellow back, Dad, it's geometry.

PEP. Gee-ometry, hey? That's a new one on me, as the feller says. When I went to school, readin', ritin', and 'rithmetic was good enough fer most folks. These newfangled notions don't help none gettin' in the crops.

BUD. Well, I'm not always going to be a farmer.

PEP. Ain't, hey? The old farm is too slow, I s'pose. When I was a young feller I'd been tickled ter death with half as much land as there is here, and ther fastest trottin' mare in the country ter take the gals out ridin' with. I s'pose that college feller has got yer started on goin' off to school agin..

BUD. I don't see why I can't go. You could afford to send me and never miss the money.

PEP. I ain't goin' to hev no dudes in my family; like as not you'd want a nigger to wait on yer, same as he has.

BUD. That's nonsense,—Jack is a football man, and Sam goes along to rub him down. He's overtrained, that's all.

PEP. Overtrained, eh? Wal, if he had to git up and milk a dozen caows every mornin' he wouldn't need no rubbin', and the nigger could keep in practice on the hosses.

BUD. Jack is all right, and you bet he can play football, too. Wish I had the chance he's got.

PEP. Wal, ye ain't likely to have it, far as I'm consarned ; that young scalawag has been talkin' to yer ma, too, and she is nigh as sot on packin' yer off to school somewhere as you be on goin' ; wish he'd mind his own business, like Mr. Puffer does.

BUD. I don't like Puffer, Dad—he's too smooth a talker.

PEP. Wal, long as he pays his board, guess we needn't worry none. Say, Bud, ain't there some kind of 'oserphey, 'ometry er 'ology that'll tell ye about that coal ridge daown in the back pasture ?

BUD. Mineralogy tells about all kinds of formations.

PEP. Wal, Bud, if ye're baound to keep prowlin' into book larinin', better look that up a leetle.

BUD. I guess there's nothing there worth much.

PEP. Mebbe not ; but you can't allus tell. Jest go over to the wood lot and figger up how many cords them fellers has cut ; yer won't need no book for that, I reckon.

BUD. All right, Dad, guess I can find out for you. [Exit.

(PEP. seats himself on pail.)

PEP. It does beat all ; here's Highland Farm, best in the country, and that boy don't take no more interest than if 'twas a sand heap ; nothin' but a bookworm, but I'll make a farmer out of him yit, by cracky. Here comes that Puffer feller ; guess he's goin' to stay another week. (Enter J. WILSON PUFFER. PEP. rises and shakes hands.) Glad to see ye back, Mr. Puffer.

PUF. Yes, I needed a little more rest. You are taking things easy too, I see. So would I if I owned a farm like this.

PEP. 'Tis a purty nice piece of land, I'll admit, but takin' things easy don't pay taxes or hire the help ; slack season just now, crops all in and fall plowin' done ; there's plenty of work most of the time.

PUF. Yes, I suppose there is a lot of work, but you could make a good living here and not do a stroke of work.

PEP. I don't kalkerate the taownship will hev to take care of me jest yit ; don't know of no other way to git a livin' for nothin' raound these parts.

PUF. That is not the idea at all. I was referring to that ridge of land in your back pasture, which I am positive contains a vein of coal. I am more or less of an expert on coal

formations, and yours certainly has all the outward appearances of a rich deposit.

PEP. By gum, I allus said there was coal on that 'ere ridge.

PUF. Why not develop it, then? Hasn't anybody ever tried to get hold of it before?

PEP. Wal, yes, but 'twa'n't for sale then no more than 'tis now. This farm has been in our family for five generations, and by heck it's goin' to stay as long as I kin pay the taxes.

PUF. But you don't need to sell it; lease it, my dear man, lease it. I wanted to talk with you about this before, but you have always been busy. Now, if you will give me a ten days' option on the property, I can form a company and sell enough stock to start operations right away. You can keep a controlling interest of the stock and I will sell only as much as you wish to dispose of. I have organized a good many companies in the last few years, but I must admit that your property promises better than any I have seen for a long time. (*Hands card.*) Here is my card; you see I have had considerable experience; now why not give me the option? (*Produces papers.*) I have the proper papers here, so all you will have to do is just sign this thing over to me for a stated time, and then it will be up to me to produce results.

PEP. See here, young man—I got through signin' papers without knowin' what I'm doin'. A feller come along one day sellin' lightnin' rods—smooth speakin' chap, nice and per-lite; wal, he wanted to put a couple of rods on my barn fer an advertisement and said it wouldn't cost me nothin'. I was willin', but he said he'd have to have a receipt to show his boss where them rods went to, so I up and signed it for him, or leastwise I thought I did; next week 'long comes a hull load of lightnin' rods for me,—had my signed order, and by gum I had to pay for the hull lot. When you go up ter the haouse jest ask Ma what happened to the next feller that tried to sell me lightnin' rods.

PUF. The rascal certainly took an unfair advantage of your good nature.

PEP. Jest so. 'Nother time a feller wanted to make me a present of the "Indexed History of the World"—said he was givin' a set free to one prominent resident in every community, jest to advertise his paper, *The Farmers' World*, and if I'd take the books it wouldn't cost me a cent. "Jest write yer name and address," sez he, "so we'll know where to send 'em."

Mr. Puffer, I been payin' a dollar a month for the last three years fer that *Farmers' World*. Naow do ye suppose I'm goin' to sign that paper without knowin' what I'm doing?

PUF. That is all right, Mr. Peppers; take the option and look it over. If it is all right, sign it. I am in no hurry.

PEP. Wal, it won't do no harm to look it over. *Winks*.

(*Takes paper.*)

PUF. Of course not—take it along. I am going for a short walk and will see you again about this matter. [Exit.]

PEP. Naow he seems like a straightforward feller—none of your shifty talkers abaout him. I allers thought there was coal in that ridge. I'll jest take this paper up to the haouse and look it over. [Exit; drops PUF.'s card.]

Enter JACK DREW, in football suit, from R. Enter BUD, from L.

JACK. Hello, Bud, working hard? Didn't know you were around this afternoon.

BUD. I was going over to the wood lot, but the men have got through and come home. What have you got those togs on for?

JACK. Just to limber up a little—a week out of practice is a long time for me. I'd like to be ripping up the scrubs' line right now.

BUD. How much longer are you going to stay here?

JACK. Only a day or so. I was down pretty fine and the coach knew what he was doing when he sent me up here; there won't be any trouble getting back into the game, but I hate to miss any of the fun.

BUD. You're lucky to have the chance to play at all. I'd like to have the show you've got for getting an education—to say nothing of playing football.

JACK. Well, why don't you go to college? This is one of the best farms in the country, so it can't be because you can't afford it.

BUD. No, that's not it. Dad doesn't believe in higher education for farmers. I had all I could do to get a couple of years at the academy. That's where I learned what little I know about football. That little scrimmage we had yesterday with the men and Pete was the most fun I've had for a long time.

JACK. You sized things up in great shape—wish we had you on our squad.

BUD. I made good on the academy team; that's why I stayed two years. Funny thing, but Dad is crazy over football and would drive ten miles to see a game; besides, I used to line up the farm hands so he could play too, and the old man wasn't such a slouch either. I had all I could manage to block him and keep him from getting through. Of course it wasn't much of an imitation of real football, but there were always fifteen or twenty harvest hands around the place, so we had some pretty good scrimmages.

JACK. It's queer your father don't send you to college; he seems broad-minded enough about most things.

BUD. Well, he won't and it's not much use to try and make him change his mind, so mother and I have about given up.

JACK. It's too bad, anyway. I've a notion to try and persuade him to let you go back with me.

BUD. Go ahead and try, but it won't do any good. Hello, what's this? (*Picks up card and reads.*) "J. Wilson Puffer, Mining Expert and Broker, Morton Building, New York City."

JACK. Let me see that name a minute. Well, if that isn't old Windy's shingle, I'll eat it.

BUD. He's the star boarder up to the house, but I guess you haven't met him; he was away last week and just got back yesterday afternoon. Do you know anything about him?

JACK. Nothing good enough to speak of. I used to fag for him at boarding-school, 'til he got fired for working a flimflam game among the fellows. I was a little shaver then, so he wouldn't remember me now, but that's his name and he ought to be a full-fledged crook by this time, at the rate he was going—but excuse me—maybe he is a friend of yours.

BUD. Not a bit of it—I don't like the fellow's looks, but he acts decent enough and Dad seems to have taken quite a shine to him.

JACK. He generally has some scheme up his sleeve. I don't want to be personal, but there isn't any mortgage on the farm, is there?

BUD. Oh, no, there's nothing around here he can grab, unless it's Dad's coal mine.

JACK. A coal mine! Windy is strong on mining propositions. How much of a vein have you got? I am specializing on mining myself.

BUD. Why, Dad thinks there is coal in that ridge down in the back pasture, but I don't believe it.

JACK. Well, you can bet that is what Windy is after—all he wants is a chance to sell stock ; your father had better watch him pretty close.

BUD. I'm glad you told me about him. Dad is looking over some papers up to the house now that he said belonged to Puffer.

JACK. He wants to be careful about signing anything—J. Wilson is a pretty slick article.

BUD. Guess I'll go up and see what those papers are. Much obliged for your tip. [Exit.]

JACK. It's a shame to keep a fellow like that penned up on a farm. I'm going to try and persuade his father to let him go back to college with me. (*Enter PETE, out of breath.*) Hello, Pete, who are you chasing ?

PETE. I just give dat spike coat-tailed guy de slip ; he's looking for me with gore in his lamps.

JACK. What have you been doing to him ?

PETE. Nothin' much. I was milkin' the brindle heifer dis mornin' and he wants me to put him wise to de trick of pumpin' de cream. I jest put de stool on de oder side and bossy done de rest. Puffer landed on a pile of corn stalks. I don't like dat guy.

JACK. I don't either, Pete, if he is the gentleman I think he is ; but say, child, you've got a pretty up-to-date bunch of slang for a rube—where did you get it ?

PETE. I ain't been in de rooral districts long. I got on me uppers tryin' to keep a-goin' by shinin' shoes down in de city, so I beats it for de country.

JACK. Well, you found a good place all right. Thought you were a pretty wise one for a farmer's lad.

PETE. Bet yer life. I'm over seven and I ain't run de streets for nothin' ; you got to get up wid de song birds to beat out Petey.

JACK. Don't you find it pretty slow on the farm after city life?

PETE. Not so bad wid a full dinner pail. I can kid de Mick and de Swede that works around de place, and now der's that nigger of yours to jolly along wid, too.

JACK. Better be careful ; you will be starting a race war.

PETE. De Swede would win out if I did. Wonder if Puffer will be around to milk bossy to-night.

JACK. Look here, Pete, I wish you would keep your eye on that fellow.

PETE. He's a nosey guy all right; I'll keep me peepers open.

JACK. I wish you would. Well, I'm going out to boot the pigskin a while. [Exit.]

PETE. There ain't nothin' stuck up about that feller, if he is one of them college dudes. I'll bet that nigger has a soft snap. Wow, here comes Puffer and de boss, real nice and chummy like. Guess I'll hide somewhere and see what de game is.

(Crawls into an empty barrel which he covers over with a bag or blanket.)

Enter PUF. and PEP. talking earnestly, PEP. holding legal-looking document.

PUF. You see it is exactly as I represent, Mr. Peppers? This is merely a ten days' option to lease that coal land, and at its expiration, if I am unable to carry out my agreement, the lease will be canceled. Now if you have signed the paper I will send instructions to my lawyer and get this started at once.

PEP. Wal, I ain't signed yit, but it reads all right and there don't appear to be no chance of any one gettin' the best of me long as I hold most of the stock. Ain't that right, Mr. Puffer?

PUF. Exactly. Now the sooner we get things started the better for all concerned. This property will make you a rich man within a few months. Can you suggest any reason for further delay?

PEP. I kinder like to talk things over with Ma and Bud, but I kalkerate this'll be a surprise for 'em. S'pose I might as well go up to the haouse and sign it.

PUF. You needn't go to the house—I have a fountain pen here; just put the paper on this barrel. (PUF. takes paper from PEP., pulls out handkerchief from coat-tail pocket together with a similar-looking paper, blows nose and at same time exchanges papers unnoticed by PEP.; lays paper on empty barrel.) Just sign right here, Mr. Peppers.

(PEP. signs.)

PEP. There's my John Hancock to that, young man. Naow you hev got ten days to make a coal mine, by cracky.

PUF. Just leave that to me, my dear man.

PEP. I reckon it will come out all right. I've got to go up to the haouse anyway. I'll be back arter a while. [Exit.]

PUF. Congratulate yourself, Puffer, old man; why, that is the slickest deal I've pulled off in a long time—talk about easy marks, why, it was dead easy. Those two papers were so near alike that the old hayseed bit right away, but I guess he will know the difference when he finds he has given me a ten years' lease of his farm, instead of a ten days' option on a worthless rock pile; all the coal in that ridge I could carry in my hat, but the old duffer will have to come up with a big bunch of money before I cancel this lease and let him work his farm again. I have everything fixed my way, and he hasn't got a look in. Guess my coat-tail pocket is the safest place for this little bunco budget at present. (*Walks toward exit; PETE goes out at other exit unseen by PUF. PUF. returns to c. again.*) I'll bet the old fossil will wiggle some when I show my hand and collect his greenbacks. I can fill in a witness all right. Here comes somebody now.

Enter BUD and JACK.

BUD. Hello, Mr. Puffer, I see you're back again; this is Mr. Drew. I don't believe you have met before.

PUF. (*shaking hands with JACK*). Very glad to meet Mr. Drew, or anybody else with that letter on his chest. (*Points to "R" on JACK's sweater.*) It's a long time since I have been at old Rexford, but I'm still a loyal son.

JACK. What year were you, Mr. Puffer?

PUF. Way back in the early nineties—got my degree in '93. I'm glad to meet a football man from the old college—that was my game in those days; best quarter-back in the state then, if I do say it myself. What are you doing here with a suit on?

JACK. I was down a little too fine in training, and the coach sent me up here to rest. I'll be back in the game Saturday, though.

PUF. I often long to get into a scrimmage once more, but those things are past for a busy man like me. I simply had to take rest. Hope I'll see you again, Mr. Drew.

JACK. I guess we'll meet again.

[Exit PUF.]

BUD. What do you think of his nibbs?

JACK. Same old Windy, and as big a bluff as ever ; he never even saw the inside of Rexford, and he never had sand enough to play marbles, let alone football ; he has still got the same old gift of gab, though, and you can bet he is up to some shady deal.

BUD. I just missed Dad at the house, and mother said he and Puffer had been talking business. I don't like the looks of things.

JACK. We will both keep our eyes open, and see if we can't get on to Puffer's game.

Enter PETE.

PETE. Say, Bud, de boss wants to see youse up to de house ; he's got some figgerin' for you to do.

BUD. All right, Pete—see you later, Jack.

[*Exit.*]

JACK. Well, kid, anything new ?

PETE. Bottle yer curiosity and listen to Pete, de boy detective. I've got one on dat spike coat-tailed guy dat would make Stealthy Steve look for anudder occupation. Yer see I spotted Puffer and de boss a-comin' down de path real chummy like and him a-doin' all de talkin' ; when dey hikes it for here little Petey just drops into dat barrel and listens wid me eye glued to a knot-hole. De boss has got a paper and Puffer wants him to sign it, but de boss is a little shy at first, so de guy lets loose his gab agin an' de boss gives in. Now, here's where me close obserwation act comes in. Puffer takes de paper to put on a barrel so de boss can sign it, but just den he pulls out his bandanner wid anudder paper along wid it—blows his horn wid de bandanner and shifts de two papers at de same time, so de old man didn't sign de one he thought he did. Ain't that a phony deal ?

JACK. That certainly does look suspicious. Are you sure Farmer Peppers only signed one paper ?

PETE. Sure thing ; me eyesight ain't failin' none, er me hearin' either, an' I used 'em both dat time. But de rest was a cinch for Petey, fer de guy up an' gives de whole game away to hisself. He tells hisself, and incerdently me, too, dat de boss has give him a lease on de farm fer ten years by signin' dat paper instid of de other one.

JACK. That sounds plausible—he must have changed the papers. Well, Pete, I'm going out and do a little sleuth work myself. You have got along fine so far—just keep track of Puffer, and I'll see you later.

(*Exit JACK one side. Enter MIKE RILEY and OLE SWANSON other side.*)

MIKE. Shure an' Oi'd loike to have nothin' to do loike that football feller.

OLE. Ay tank futball goot fun. Ay like to play what you call hold-back.

MIKE. Ah, g'wan, ye tow-headed Swede, it ain't a hold-back ye mane, it's a push-back.

OLE. Ay tow-head all right, but Ay ain't red-head. Ay say it was hold-back already.

PETE. What're youse two immigrants chewin' de rag about? Neider one of youse kin tell a football from a pumpkin.

MIKE. Aw, chase yerself, ye little spalpeen; Oi'll wring yer neck if yer give me anny sass.

PETE. Take some one yer size, yer big mut; tackle de Swede dere—hey, Ole, I betcher youse can't put him on his Hibernian back.

OLE. Ay don't know what back iss dot. Him bane no tackle, him bay guard.

PETE. Aw, ye're gettin' yer dope mixed; this ain't signal practice. I'll betcher de Swede kin put you on de floor, Mike.

MIKE. No yéz don't, ye blatherskite; Oi ain't afther startin' no trubble—shure an' Nora wad lave me intoirely, if Oi came home wid me face all bunged up, and it's bunged up it'd be, fer there ain't no Swade in ther counthry could put me on me back till he'd spoilt me face and his own, too, begorry.

OLE. Ay no fight neither, but Ay bane hard man to leek goot; Ay tank it bay harder to leek me as you.

(*Points to MIKE.*)

MIKE. Bad luck to yez fer a braggart; Oi kin trow ye meself; come on an' thry it.

OLE. Ay don't mind if Ay do.

(*They clinch; enter SAM, who passes behind them; PETE sticks out foot and trips SAM, who falls so that all of them fall in a heap. All get up.*)

SAM. What yo' fink yo' doin'? Ah ain't no doah-mat.

MIKE. What do yez mane by buttin' into this, annyway?

OLE. Ay tank Ay skoll heet somebody.

PETE. Gee, this is great; mix 'em up, Ebony.

SAM. Ah ain't lookin' fo' trouble, but Ah ain't goin' to be set on by no erdopted citizens of dis heah free country. Ah'll fix bofe ob you when Ah gets goin'.

(*Swings arms and draws back to hit MIKE. Enter JACK, who grabs SAM's arm.*)

JACK. Here, boys, what is all this rumpus about? Pete, I'll bet you started things going here.

PETE. I'd 'a' had a foreign war here wid tree intrested representatives, if youse hadn't butted in an' spoilt it.

JACK. Well, I'm glad to be the peacemaker. Sam, you rascal, I ought to let these fellows give you a licking.

OLE. Ay tank Ay could bay able by myself.

MIKE. Shure an' yer don't think a bye frim the Imerild Isle wad let a naygur put it onto him, do yez?

PETE. Cheese it, now; de coon's all right—it was me dat tripped him. Gee, I wish you hadn't butted in, Drewsy.

JACK. I guess it's a good thing I happened along before these fellows got to punching each other.

PETE. Guess I'll beat it before dey land on me. [*Exit.*

OLE. Ay tank Ay like to blay futball on team with you, Meester Drew. Could Ay get a yob?

JACK. I'm afraid you'd be a little too rough for us, Ole; better stick to the farm.

MIKE. Shure, an' ye moight find him a job taching lang-widges; he talks in boonches foine. Come on, ye tow-head, we've got to fix that fince. [*Exeunt MIKE and OLE.*

SAM. Jest you wait till Ah catch dat ornery, obstreperous Pete. Ah bet he don't think chile life on de farm is so nice when Ah gets through wif him.

JACK. You leave Pete alone; you've got to learn to look out for tricks once in a while. Here comes Farmer Peppers, and I want to have a talk with him. You can go out and learn how to fix a fence. [*Exit SAM.*

Enter PEP.

PEP. Wal, young man, kinder behind times with them clothes, ain't ye? That looks like the rig Captain John Smith wore when he got spliced to Pokeyhontas, or Balboer when he faound the ocean.

JACK. The style may be somewhat similar, but the material is different. I don't believe the duds those fellows wore would last very long in a football game.

PEP. Reckon ye're right, bub ; I was jest joshin' ye a little. You fellers oughter wear armor plate when ye play that game.

JACK. Oh, it isn't as rough as all that.

PEP. It's a good game all the same, youngster. Wish I was young enough ter git inter it myself once in er while. That boy of mine was quite a clipper at it when he was in school.

JACK. You ought to let him go to college and keep it up. He's got the right kind of stuff for a ripping good player.

PEP. Wal, a boy can't play all the time, you know ; it's all right fer you city fellers whose Dads has got big bank rolls ter keep outer mischief that way, but Bud's old ernough naow ter be larnin' haow ter run the farm. Schoolin' won't help him do that.

JACK. I think you are wrong there ; a few years of study would do him a lot of good, and he's too bright a boy to keep on a farm, anyway.

PEP. Wal, I kalkerate he'll hev ter stay, jest the same. The old place has made a good livin' for five generations of Peppers, and I reckon it's good enough fer Bud.

JACK. You ought to send him to college first, though, and then he could come back and settle down afterward.

PEP. No, siree. The old place would be too slow for him then, jest like Josh Watkins' boys. Josh sent the hull three of 'em off ter college, and ther ain't one of 'em hes been back ter stay more than a week sence. Haow would ye like ter settle daown here fer good ?

JACK. It would be a little slow for me, I'll admit.

PEP. There ye hev the hull story. Naow don't go to fillin' my boy's head with any highfalutin notions.

JACK. Let's talk about something else, then. You said you were fond of football.

PEP. Yes, siree. I use ter go ter every game that Bud played in, and I tried ter git him to teach the men araound the place haow ter play, but they didn't do it the way you fellers do.

JACK. It takes some time and a lot of practice to make team work.

PEP. By cracky, I've got a good idee ; we'll jest git the boys tergether and have a leetle game while you're here to show 'em haow ter play. Bud kin help ye, too. Are ye willin' ?

JACK. Why, yes ; Bud and I could show you a few things, I guess. How many men can we get ?

PEP. Wal, I guess we could scare up eight or ten round here and we might borry some from the neighbors ; I'll go and hunt 'em up now. [Exit.

JACK. He's a queer old duffer, but he is very "sot in his ways," as they say around here. Bud and I will have a circus lining up that bunch of greenhorns and putting them through signal practice.

Enter PETE, running.

PETE. Hey, Drewsy, dere's a guy up ter de house dat I wants ter put youse wise to ; he's a gum-shoe sleuth fer fair.

JACK. Sleuth ? What sort of a game are you up to now ?

PETE. Honest, I ain't kiddin' yer. It's Amos Searcher, de detective from headquarters in Ward 9, down to de city. I know him 'cause he used to be de night cop what chased de kids off de street ; he's a-comin' down here lookin' fer de boss.

JACK. He's gone out to get the farm hands together and any one else he can find. We are going to have a football scrimmage here.

PETE. Gee, dat will be all to de merry ; I'll bet de Swede and de coon will mix it up den all right. I'm going out and help round 'em up. [Exit.

JACK. That youngster can take care of himself all right. Hello, here comes the tracing department now.

Enter AMOS SEARCHER.

SEAR. Good-afternoon, sir. Good-afternoon ; perhaps you will be good enough to tell me where I can find Mr. Peppers.

JACK. Mr. Puffer is taking a walk around the farm somewhere.

SEAR. (*sharply*). What's that ? I said Peppers, not Puffer.

JACK. Oh, did you ? Well, maybe you do want to see Mr. Peppers, but I guess you will have an interview with Puffer too before you are through.

SEAR. See here, young man, you seem to know a lot more about my business than I do myself. May I ask where you got such an intimate knowledge of my affairs ?

JACK. There's no use getting hot under the collar ; I know you are a detective and I know Puffer. He is on this farm and so are you. It's easy enough to put two and two together.

SEAR. Well, you aren't such a slow one either ; I like your

looks, boy, and you don't like Puffer, I can see that. Will you help me out a little?

JACK. I guess there's work enough for both of us here. J. Wilson has been getting his fine hand in here with some sort of a bunco game on Farmer Peppers.

SEAR. That fine hand of his forged a little check for a thousand or two down in our ward last week ; that's why I'm here. I might as well let you in on the whole thing. What have you got against him ?

JACK. Nothing personal, except the poundings he used to give me when I was his fag at boarding-school years ago. He don't even remember me now.

SEAR. Say, you don't belong on any farm, or those togs don't either. What are you doing here ? I used to play the game myself, but haven't handled the pigskin for ten years now.

JACK. I was a little out of condition and the coach sent me up here for a rest. We're going to have a little scrimmage after a while. Can we count you in ?

SEAR. Sure thing ; guess I can limber up enough for that. Can't we get our friend Puffer into it too ?

JACK. That would be a good idea. He has got Peppers to sign a paper under pretense of its being an option on a piece of land, but he juggled the papers so that the old man signed a ten years' lease of his farm to Puffer instead. We must get that paper away from him.

SEAR. How did you find out about all this ?

JACK. Well, I guessed at part of it, but a smart little kid here saw and heard the whole transaction. Peppers thinks Puffer is all right, and I don't suppose we can make him think any different till we prove the facts to him.

SEAR. I will have to conceal my identity then. How can I account for being here ?

JACK. I'll tell you. You can be one of the coaches from college come up to see how I am getting along. How is that ?

SEAR. That will work first rate. Now if we can get Puffer into our little game of football, we will make it interesting for him.

JACK. I guess we can manage that all right. (*Goes to door.*) Here's another newcomer, but he's a stranger to me. Not another of your profession in disguise, is he ?

SEAR. No, I guess not. He's too genuine a specimen of the rural citizen to be impersonating.

Enter SQUIRE EZRA STEBBINS.

STEB. Afternoon, strangers; leastwise I s'pose ye're strangers. I know every man, woman and child in this here caounty and I hain't never laid eyes on ye afore. Stoppin' long, be you?

JACK. We are staying with Mr. Peppers for a few days.

STEB. That so, dew tell. Where's Hi naow? Land of Goshen, young feller, what be them clothes ye got?

JACK. Why, this is my football suit.

STEB. You ain't one of them football players what the paper tells abaout, be ye? Better be keerful, young man; I was reading in the *Budget* last night abaout a feller thet had both legs and his nose broke. I wouldn't let a boy of mine play football. I'm dead sot agin sech a game.

SEAR. Oh, it's not so dangerous if a man is in condition for it; feel of this fellow—he is hard as nails.

STEB. Mebbe so, mebbe so, but I'm agin football.

SEAR. Stay around a while, Mr.—er —

STEB. Stebbins, Ezra Stebbins, J. P., constable, tax assessor, and town clerk.

JACK. Glad to know you, Mr. Stebbins—this is Mr. Searcher and my name is Drew.

STEB. Glad to know ye both. What was ye a-sayin', Mr.—Looker.

SEAR. Searcher, Amos Searcher—I just remarked that if you would stay a while we will show you how football can be played in perfect safety.

STEB. Wal, I'll stay around, but es I said afore, I'm agin football. I'll jest go aout and hunt Hi up naow. [Exit.

SEAR. He is a native son, all right.

Enter BUD, who stops on seeing SEAR.

JACK. Come over here, Bud. I want you to meet Mr. Searcher. This is Mr. Peppers, Jr., Mr. Searcher. (*Shake hands.*) I might as well let you in too, Bud—Mr. Searcher is a detective looking up our friend Puffer! I've told him about the little con game that Windy worked on your father and we are going to try and catch him with the goods on.

BUD. I've seen father and he said he gave Puffer an option for ten days on that piece of coal land and only signed one paper.

JACK. Well, he thought he did, but Puffer changed the papers, so what your father did do was sign a lease of the farm to Puffer for ten years.

BUD (*excitedly*). We—we must get it away from him. What can we do about it?

JACK. We have a plan that ought to work. Your father wants to have a little football scrimmage, and we will try and get Puffer into it. Then it will be an easy matter to search him.

SEAR. Yes, we'll have him sure, then.

BUD. Well, we ought to get started pretty soon ; it's most chore time now. I'll go and hunt up father and the men. Wouldn't you like to come along and see the place, Mr. Searcher?

SEAR. Why, yes, I would like to look around a little, but we won't have much time. [*Exeunt* BUD and SEAR.]

Enter PETE.

JACK. Well, Sherlock Holmes, have you discovered anything new?

PETE. Nuttin' much ; Windy has been up on de hill lookin' over his papers.

JACK. We must get hold of that paper by fair means or foul.

PETE. He keeps it tucked away in his coat-tail.

JACK. Well, keep your eye on that coat.

PETE. I'll watch it closer dan de tailor he owes fer it.

JACK. I think I will just run over and look at the formation of that ridge. Come on, Pete. [*Exeunt*.]

Enter PEP. and STEB., STEB. with roll of bandages and bottle of liniment.

STEB. Naow, Hi, don't ye do it. I tell ye it's dangerous. Them fellers will break yer bones, sure pop. I've known ye man and boy fer sixty years, Hi. Don't ye play with them—I'm agin football.

Enter PUF.

PEP. Guess I kin take keer of myself, Ezry.

STEB. Wal, the bandages and linermint is ready, if yer need 'em, Hi ; I got yer wife to give 'em to me. Didn't see yer boarder afore, Hi.

PEP. Jest in time, Mr. Puffer ; we're goin' ter hev a leetle football game, and need ye to fill in.

PUF. I'm afraid I'll have to be excused ; it's some time since I played football.

STEB. It's a dangerous game, Mr.—Whiffer. I'm agin football.

Enter BUD, JACK and SEAR., BUD with football.

JACK. Well, Mr. Puffer, we are almost ready for the fray. I want you to meet Mr. Searcher, one of our coaches at college. (PEP. and SEAR. *shake hands.*) Guess you haven't met Mr. Puffer, either, Mr. Searcher.

SEAR. I am very glad to meet Mr. Puffer. (*Shakes hands.*)

BUD. Here's some more material. (*Enter PETE, OLE and MIKE.*) We might pick the positions before we go outside. This is your job, Jack.

JACK. All right. Mr. Peppers and Searcher can play guards, Mike and Sam will do for tackles, and we'll put Mr. Stebbins in at left end.

STEB. No, siree. I don't kalkerlate to be carried home to the old lady with my bones busted. I'm agin football.

BUD. That's nonsense, Mr. Stebbins ; you couldn't get hurt in a line up. There's no chance for an accident. Now, don't spoil the fun for the rest of us.

STEB. Wal, Bud, I've known ye sence ye was knee high to a grasshopper, and if ye say ye're sure there ain't no danger, I'm willin', but I'll keep the linermint and bandages, by heck. Now, Hi, if I get hurt you send for Cousin Dave to come and run the farm.

PEP. I guess we won't lay yer aout, Ezry.

JACK. Pete, you are slated for quarter-back. Bud and myself will take the half-back positions, and we'll put Ole in at full-back.

OLE (*to MIKE*). What you tink now, you carrot-top ? Ay toll you hold-back.

BUD. That leaves the centre position for you, Mr. Puffer.

PUF. No, thanks ; I guess I'll be excused.

JACK. But we need you to fill out ; we are short one end, anyway. An old Rexford player like you ought to be glad to get into the game any time. You should remember Searcher ; wasn't he coach when you were playing quarter-back ?

PUF. No, I guess I was there before his time.

SEAR. Well, you haven't forgotten the old school training, anyway, I'll bet. Come on, old man, shed your coat.

PUF. Well, I'll join you, but guess I'll keep my coat on. I take cold easily.

JACK (*giving ball to PUF.*). Just pass a few to Pete, Mr. Puffer, before we go out. (*PETE stands a short distance behind PUF., and receives the ball passed by PUF.*) That was all right for a punt. Now, Pete, take the pass for one of the backs this time. (*PETE stoops close behind PUF., takes papers from PUF.'s coat-tail pocket, drops them on floor and receives ball from PUF. JACK picks up papers instantly.*) Here are some papers that somebody dropped. Guess they are yours, Mr. Peppers. One of them has your name on it.

PUF. (*straightening up*). Those papers belong to me. One of them is the option you gave me, Mr. Peppers.

JACK. This isn't an option, it's a lease.

BUD. Let me look at it. (*Reads paper.*) Why, Dad, you've leased the farm for ten years, according to this.

PEP. What's that? I didn't sign nothin' but an option on that coal ridge in the back pasture.

BUD. Your name is signed to it.

PEP. You look at this, Ezry; you're up on legal pints.

(*PUF. shifts uneasily toward door, but is blocked by JACK and SEAR.*)

STEB. This here is a bony fide lease, only it ain't got no witness.

SEAR. I suppose you intended to forge the witness, the same as you did that little check down in Ward Nine,—hey, Puffer?

PUF. Sir, your insinuations are insulting and preposterous. Who are you to spread such malicious stories about me?

SEAR. Oh, come now, Puffer, your little game is up—we caught you with the goods on this time. I have a warrant for your arrest.

STEB. I'll serve it for ye, mister—I'm the constable raound these parts.

SEAR. I guess the two of us can manage him all right. I'm a deputy myself, but we will attend to the formalities later.

PEP. I thought you were a football coach, Mr. Searcher. Haow's that?

SEAR. That was only told to mislead you till we were sure of our man. I am a detective.

OLE. What ve stop for? Ay lak to play football some more.

JACK. We have got more important business to tend to just now, so we will have to call this practice off.

SEAR. We'll just fix our man so he can't get away. Sorry I haven't got the nippers with me.

STEB. These here bandages will do; come on, boys, tie the feller up.

PUF. I protest against this. You are a legal man, Mr. Stebbins; haven't I any rights?

SEAR. This warrant provides for any rights you've got. (*Pulls out warrant.*) So we won't argue any further. Lend me a hand, somebody.

(SEAR., JACK and BUD tie PUF.'s hands behind his back.)

MIKE. Faith and they're goin' ter pinch him, sure.

PETE. Dere's some class to us detectives.

PEP. Wal, Puffer, you're like all the rest of them smooth-talkin' chaps. I used ye square and ye done me dirt.

PUF. You were too easy picking to let get by.

PEP. Wal, ye didn't get away with my feathers arter all, by gum.

SAM. Golly—dis heah sounds like a chicken raid.

JACK. Well, Windy, I guess we are square now on all those punches you handed me when I was fagging for you at boarding-school.

PUF. So it's you I've got to thank for spoiling my scheme, is it? I hadn't recognized you before. If it hadn't been for your interference I would have pulled off my little game in good style.

JACK. My interference—I'm a football man, you know, Puffer, and interference is my strong point.

PEP. There ain't nobody else goin' to git even a look at that coal ridge.

JACK. You needn't worry about that, Mr. Peppers—there is only a slight surface formation that resembles traces of coal somewhat, but it is absolutely worthless. There is a fine gravel bed underneath, though, that ought to be worth something.

PEP. How did you find out, young man?

JACK. I'm studying mining and mineralogy at college, and I looked your ground over a little while ago.

PEP. (*scratching head*). Wal, I guess eddication pays arter

all. Bud, you go up to the haouse and pack up yer duds so ye kin go back to the college with this chap. We'll hev one in the family that kin tell a bunco steerer, by cracky.

BUD. Bully for you, Dad—you'll never be sorry you let me go.

JACK. I'm glad you have finally come around to the right way of thinking, Mr. Peppers.

SEAR. I must get this fellow to the station.

BUD. We had better get ready to go along with them, Jack.

PETE. Dat college will have a crackerjack team dis year.

OLE. Ay wish Ay could get a yob to play hold-back.

MIKE. Ye've got a job helpin' me hitch up jest now. Come on, ye Swade, and a couple more of yez. Shure and we'll give de crook a real live sind-off, begorry.

[*Exeunt MIKE, OLE, PETE.*]

JACK. Sam, go and get my traps together ; we're going back to the boys to-night.

SAM. Golly, Ah s'pose Ah'll have to rub bof ob you down now. [Exit.]

SEAR. It's time we were starting, Officer Stebbins. I will see you gentlemen later. Come along, Mr. Puffer.

PUF. It's too bad I broke up your football practice, Peppers.

(SEAR. and STEB. each take PUF.'s arm.)

STEB. Don't ye let Bud git to playing football daown to college, Hi ; I'm agin football.

[*Exeunt SEAR., STEB., and PUF.*]

PEP. Wal, Bud, ye've got yer chance at last. Naow jest follow this chap's interference that he tells erbaout, and yer dad will be satisfied.

JACK. Don't worry over Bud, Mr. Peppers ; he is bound to score for himself.

BUD. We'll have to hurry to catch that train. Dad, you're a brick. Come on, Jack, let's rush him.

(BUD and JACK pick up PEP., and carry him off stage.)

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